(c) if so, when; and

(d) by when the licence is likely to be granted and the branches would become operational?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA): (a) to (c) The Himachal Gramin Bank (HGB) on extension of their area of operation to Hamirpur, Una & Bilaspur districts proposed to Reserve Bank of India (RBI) through National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) for opening of new branches at these centres. The applications for these licenses were received by RBI on 30th December, 2000.

(b) The RBI has authorized HGB on 10th July, 2001 to open branches in the above three centres. The branches would be able to function after the Himachal Gramin Bank sets up the necessary infrastructure facilities and thereafter obtains the licence from the Regional Office of RBI at Chandigarh.

Telephone Exchanges connected with OFC in Tehri, Uttaranchal

†*135. SHRI MANOHAR KANT DHYANI: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that 22 telephone exchanges were identified during 1998-99 for providing STD service to Tehri revenue district of Uttaranchal;

(b) what is their latest position alongwith the total number of such telephone exchanges in the district; and

(c) the details of laying down of OFC line in the district so far alongwith the number of exchanges connected with it?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) In addition to the 22 telephone exchanges identified in 1998-99, 20 more telephone exchanges in Tehri Revenue District have been provided with STD facility.

(c) The work of laying of Optical Fibre Cable (OFC) is in progress and at present 79 Route Kms. of OFC has been laid. Out of 42

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi.

exchanges, 15 exchanges are working on OFC media, 13 exchanges are connected on Micro Wave (M/W), 4 exchanges on Satellite media. The remaining 10 exchanges are on overhead media and these exchanes are planned to be provided on reliable media during 2001-02.

Loss suffered by AAI

*136. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:
SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI:

Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the observations of Comptroller and Auditor General of India regarding the loss suffered by Airports Authority of India in finalizing bids for awarding of a contract for running duty free shops; and

(b) if so, what steps have been taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI SHARAD YADAV): (a) and (b) The Comptroller and Auditor General, in its report has observed that the contracts for Duty Free Shops could not be awarded to highest bidder due to Management's lapse in inviting bids for running the Duty Free Shops departmentally without having expertise for the same and obtaining financial bids in an erroneous manner from the existing parties for the original tender, and AAI had to forego a total revenue of Rs. 168.75 crores upto June, 2000. The facts of the matter in this regard are as under:

In June, 1995, AAI had invited pre-qualification global tanders for selection of consultant/consolidators to assist the AAI to set up Duty Free Shopping Arcades in the additional areas identified at the five international airports of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata and Thiruvananthapuram. In January, 1996 a Committee felt that AAI did not have sufficient experience in the running of duty free shops. Therefore, the committee decided to select a concessionaire for running duty free shops and shortlisted four parties from the bids received. Accordingly in August, 1996, AAI asked those shortlisted